

## **Public Use and Military Airports**

California's 250 public use airports consist of a combination of privately owned airports, and airports that are owned by local governments, or airport districts. Ownership and operation of an airport is sometimes a combined public-private effort between a city or county, and a contract airport management company. Regardless of who owns or operates the airports in California, they are all part of a global aviation network. There are three types of airports: commercial, military, and general aviation (GA). GA airports can be for public use, or private use. As their name implies, public use airports are open to the general public and anyone can use them, while private use airports can only be used by their owner or invited guests. In addition to the public use airports, the federal government owns and operates numerous military airfields throughout state. Civilian aircraft must have special permission to use these military airfields.

### **Trends and Issues**

#### **Capacity Constraints**

Capacity at commercial service airports is defined as the maximum volume of all arriving and departing aircraft. An airport can only handle a specific number of operations without saturation (the equivalent to gridlock), and is limited by runways, taxiways, and terminals. In 2003 and 2007, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) completed two major national airport capacity assessments, publishing their findings in the Future Airport Capacity Task (FACT) 1 and 2 reports. The reports focused on the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. They identified five California airports as being among the most capacity constrained airports in the nation. These airports are: John Wayne Airport (Orange County), Oakland International and San Francisco International Airports (San Francisco Bay Area), Long Beach Airport (Los Angeles County) and San Diego International (San Diego County). San Diego International is so constrained that the only way future demand can be met is through the construction of a new airport.

Although FACT 1 and 2 focused primarily on the nation's commercial airports, it acknowledged that GA airports would have an important part in meeting future system wide capacity needs. GA airports provide back-up capacity for both commercial and non-commercial aviation demand. Preservation of airports through better interagency planning, and secure funding would insure that California's future air travel demands are met. Unfortunately, GA airports are often overlooked in transportation planning at all levels of government in California.

#### **Complex Regulatory Framework**

Airports are governed by a complex regulatory framework. They must comply with federal, state, and local aviation regulations. They must also work with numerous non-aviation agencies that have permitting or funding authority, including federal and state environmental protection and resource agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers, regional transportation planning agencies, and local governments. The State's role in regulating airports through the Caltrans Division of Aeronautics (Division) includes permitting airports and heliports, and conducting periodic safety

inspections to ensure compliance with design standards stipulated in the California Code of Regulations. The Division also provides land use guidance through planning documents such as the Airport Land Use Compatibility Handbook and the California Aviation System Plan (CASP), manages the State's Airport Noise Program, and administers airport funding through its loan and grants programs. Local government agencies are responsible for land use around airports. They include airports in their General Plan policy document and use implementing tools such as Specific Plans and zoning ordinances. Airport Land Use Commissions (ALUC) develop recommended land use strategies for property around each airport, and write Airport Land Use Compatibility Plans (ALUCP) for the airports in their county. Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Planning Agencies include airport planning as part of their overall transportation planning and programming i.e. funding work. This overlapping jurisdictional responsibility sometimes results in contradictory regulations, investments and plans.

### **Aviation Funding**

Unlike other modes of transportation, airports are not funded through the State Highway Account and State Transportation Improvement Program process. The bulk of funding for GA airports comes either directly from the FAA or indirectly through the State's Aeronautics Account to the eligible public use airport owners. The types of funds available to an airport depend on the federal and state grant programs criteria.

Recent State budget balancing efforts have resulted in significant reductions in the Aeronautics Account. Suspension of all Aeronautics grant programs for FY 2009/10 and transfer of \$4.0M from the Aeronautics Account has negatively impacted airports in several ways. Airports no longer have the State money to use as a match for the federal grant funds to improve their facilities. Thus, some airports are deferring routine maintenance which will result in higher future operation and maintenance costs. Airports are not eligible to receive Annual Credits in the amount of \$10K/year to address safety and operational expenses, and airports are not eligible to apply for Acquisition and Development grants for safety projects that may not have been funded by the FAA.

See State *Dollars for Your Airport* for additional details regarding airport funding at:  
<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/planning/aeronaut/document/StateDollarsForAirport2009.pdf>

### **Perceptions and Misperceptions about the Value of Airports**

According to the June 2003 economic study *Aviation in California: Benefits to Our Economy and Way of Life*, aviation generates almost 10% of the State's GDP and employment base. Aviation offers an effective business tool for expediting delivery times of passengers and cargo. Corporate location decisions are sometimes based on proximity to an airport. GA airports in rural communities provide vital links to the rest of the State and world.

Unfortunately for all their benefits, the value and potential of California's airports are often under estimated. If the airport environs are preserved to allow for airport growth, airports can be a revenue generating asset that contributes to the long term economic well being of a community.

Local governments must weigh potential future revenues against immediate short term tax revenue gains from residential and commercial projects.

### **Adjacent Airport Land Uses**

The single most challenging issue facing California airports is encroachment from incompatible land uses. An incompatible land use means any land use or structure that interferes with the safe operation of the airport, or is inconsistent with the State mandated Airport Land Use Commission's compatibility plan pursuant to Public Utilities Code 21001 et seq. Competing land uses, misunderstanding of an airport's value to the community, and the cost of an airport's infrastructure work against the public's appreciation of their airport. Siting problems with wetlands, power plants, wind turbine facilities, expansion of existing land uses, and obstructions that penetrate navigable airspace around airports can also limit an airport's ability to operate safely, and constrain their economic viability and long term sustainability.

### **Future Growth Opportunities**

- Growth in business aviation and goods movement
- Future demand for new commercial aircraft, and individual aircraft ownership of business aircraft (including fractional ownership)
- Modify the Division's CASP System Needs Assessment and Policy Elements to include gap analysis projects and priorities
- Add a recommendation for inclusion of an airport buffer zone, like a greenbelt, in local planning documents and policies in the 2010 Airport Land Use Handbook update
- Promote green technology at airports, such as San Francisco International and Fresno Yosemite Airports see link: <http://www.flysfo.com/web/page/about/green/index.html>
- Amend CEQA Guidelines to require distribution of NOPs to local ALUCs for all projects within 2 miles of any public use airport
- Raise visibility and importance of aviation planning within Caltrans through a director's policy or deputy directive
- Maintain Division function at Caltrans HQ, and create aeronautics liaisons in the districts
- Highlight jobs created by the aviation sector of the economy
- Address environmental justice issues around airports
- State Aeronautics Account needs dedicated reliable funding, and protection from "fund transfers" by the Department of Finance

*Source: California Aviation System Plan*  
*<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/planning/aeronaut/documents/CASP2006.pdf>*  
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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
DIVISION OF AERONAUTICS

# Public Use Airports - 2008 And Military Airfields

## LEGEND

- ◆ Commercial/Primary
- ▲ Metropolitan
- ◆ Regional
- Community
- Limited Use
- ✈ Joint Use (Military/Commercial)
- ✈ Military/NASA

